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Dear Balbir & Susan Iootla,

I have received a copy of your letter to Nina Van Gorkom. She has asked me to reply to you in my own way in order to 'live up' the Dhamma. It helps us to understand the teachings if we ~~take~~^{hear} it from different sources. I then send copies of my letters to others so they can share.

I have been a Buddhist for ten years studying from the Pali Texts, Nina's writings and Khun Supin in Thailand. I also very much appreciate Nina's articles, they are easy to read and very precise. She always stresses the importance of the direct awareness (sati) and direct understanding (panna) of any reality which appears now. Whatever we are doing, wherever we are, however busy we are, there are just different realities which arise and fall away. Either nama the reality which experiences an object or rupa the reality which ~~does~~ does not experience an object. These realities are the Five khandas or aggregates, they are ready to be understood at any time, but first we should have the right understanding of the development of sati & panna. The intellectual understanding of the Dhamma is the condition for sati & panna to arise. There is no self who can cause any reality to arise. We have to be so very patient to

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Let understanding arise by conditions and forget the trying or wishing for results.

Highly developed understanding can directly experience the impermanence ~~of~~ (anicca) of nama & rupa. This is the first stage of 'principal insight' mahā-vipassanā. (in Pali: udayabbhaya-nupassana ñāna). ~~This~~ knowledge has to applied again ^{and} again in order to realise eight more stages of insight until finally enlightenment is attained and Nibbana directly experienced. It is by experiencing Nibbana that kilesas and latent tendencies are eradicated never again to ~~arise~~ arise.

We have to be very careful to understand what it is that panna experiences ~~that~~ as dukkha, anicca, anatta. Before we can ^{realities} experience the impermanence of conditioned & there must be the clear comprehension of nama as ~~not~~ quite different from rupa. This is the first Vipassana ñāna or insight knowledge in Pali: nāma-rūpa-pariccheda-ñāna.

When this stage of insight arises only one characteristic of reality can appear at a time. e.g. When hardness is the object of panna through the {body sense, there is just that characteristic (rupa) there is no person, or world, no seeing or hearing, no sound, ^{or} just a conditional moment ~~at~~ which does not belong to anyone. I quote from Khun Sujin.

"There are six worlds but only one world is bright.... Are you ready to live in darkness in the bright world."

This refers to ~~the~~ vipassana ñāna. Even it is very bright outside, if sound ~~is~~ is object

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of panna there is no seeing at this moment.
"Also from Kindred Sayings book IV, 72
".... Well for me, lord, if the Exalted One would
teach me a teaching in brief, hearing which
teaching, I might dwell solitary, remote, earnest
ardent and aspiring."

~~Herein~~ Herein, then, of those things
seen, heard, imagined, cognizable. in what is
seen you will have only the seen, in what is
heard you will have only the heard. In what
is imagined ... only the imagined.. "99

Even the first vipassana nāna is
very difficult to experience. It is good to
know about the different stages of
vipassana nāna in order not to mistakenly
think we are more advanced than we are.

When different stages of vipassana nāna
are realised we will become more and more
detached from the idea of self. We will understand
that seeing, hearing, feeling touching tasting
are just conditioned ~~nama's~~ nama's which
do not belong to anyone. When there is no
awareness of seeing and hearing there will be the
idea of self that sees and hears. We should
not underestimate the subtlety of the teachings.
After the Buddha had won enlightenment
he was inclined for a moment not to teach
what he had discovered because of its ~~profound~~
profundity. From the Kindred Sayings text i. 136

"This that thro' many toils I've won,
Enough! Why should I make it known?
By folk with lust and hate consumed
Not this a Norm that can be grasped.
Against the stream of common thought

awareness can arise and stay

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"This that thro' many toils I've won,
Enough! Why should I make it known?
By folk with lust and hate consumed
Not this a worm that can be grasped.
Against the stream of common thought

awareness can arise and study of names

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Deep, subtle, fine and hard to see
Unseen & will be by passions slaves
Cloaked in the muck of ignorance."

The teachings of the Buddha are so very daily. In the morning I sometimes wake up with unpleasant feeling caused by the loud sound of an alarm clock. I do not choose when to wake up. There are conditions for seeing, hearing, thinking etc to arise, so they occur by themselves. I do not choose to have unpleasant feeling, it is conditioned by the loud sound. There can be awareness of such unpleasant feeling or sound or thinking as soon as we wake up if we have accumulated the right conditions. There is no need to concentrate first or to select an object for sati or to reflect on the Dhamma. Sati is anatta (not self) and arises by its own condition. If there is no sati, there is ignorance (moha), we do not try to have moha it is conditioned by previous accumulation. The intellectual understanding of the Dhamma forms up the condition for sati & panna to arise.

I was eating my favourite cake when visitors arrived. I did not offer them a piece to eat and then somebody reminded me of my stinginess, I then offered them some cake. He said so much about the advantages and wholesomeness of giving, but still sometimes I'm mean. Stinginess is conditioned to arise, it does not belong to me. I cannot say I will never be stingy I cannot control it. At such moments awareness can arise and study stinginess as 'just' a reality. Unpleasant feeling

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which accompanies stinginess can also be the object of awareness. Whilst sati is there is pleasant feeling accompanied by attachment, or taste or temperature, realities which can be the object of awareness.

You mention you have been practicing vedananupassana, the contemplation of feelings from the satipatthana sutta. As I understand this sutta it is to remind us not to be forgetful to be aware of any reality at any time. The Buddha did not say we should select a particular object for the development of insight or to be calm first or to be in a quiet place. We will better understand the anattanness of realities if we let sati arise by its own conditions in our ordinary daily life.

Satipatthana is difficult because it is not the object of desire, but the object of understanding. From the previous quoted sutta, "Unseen I will be by passions slaves cloaked in the muck of ignorance, desire moves us away from the present reality to the reality which has not come yet. We must recognise this. Intention to select a particular reality or intention to be in quiet place can be attachment moving us away from this moment. Desire is like a trap or a bait always getting us away from understanding nama or rupa arising now.

The very beginning of the development of insight is the right intellectual foundation. We must ~~know~~ know what is the correct object which panna can understand. We use the words nama and rupa, but we must clearly understand what realities these words represent.

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I recently read an article on walking meditation and the author said that one should be mindful of where one puts ones feet. It showed he did not have the correct understanding of nama and rupa. What is seen is rupa, it is not a foot or the gravel or a place. It is just a characteristic of reality which can be seen. Foot, place, person are the building up of stories by our thinking conditioned by the seeing. Understanding can separate the sense door process from the mind door process. Again what is touched is not a foot or person or table it is just a reality hardness or softness, hot or cold motion or pressure. There is no person who experiences rupa, it is just nama a reality which experiences an object.

The test of whether we have understanding or not, is this moment. What do you see? if it is something or somebody, then we have not even the clear understanding of nama and rupa by direct experience, so how could we have the knowledge of impermanence of reality?

Khun Sujin once remarked that there were ants on top of mount Everest, they get there by taking one short little step at a time. Ants get everywhere. They don't think to themselves how far they should go today. They don't look back and think how far they have come.

The highest peak of understanding (Nibbana) is attained in the same way, just one short little step. So just keep on walking....

Best Wishes,
Alan Weller